

NEW JERSEY

2000-2001

Guidelines and
Application

BEST

PRACTICES

REC'D NOV 27 2000

**Deadline for Application to County Office:
NOVEMBER 27, 2000**

The Best Practices application is a public document. The information that you provide will serve as the official record. Review the application prior to submission to ensure accuracy and adherence to the guidelines. Type or keyboard information requested on this page and page 2, if applicable.

Category Citizenship/Character Education (Application is limited to one category. See page 3 for details.)
Practice Name Jefferson Debates
Number of Schools with Practice 1 (If more than one school or district, read and complete information on page 2.)

County	<u>Mercer</u>
District (Proper Name)	<u>Princeton Regional Schools</u>
Address	Street/P. O. Box <u>25 Valley Road</u> City <u>Princeton, NJ</u> <u>08540</u> Zip Code
Telephone	<u>609-924-9322</u> Fax <u>924-5541</u> Email <u>.</u>
Chief School Administrator	<u>Claire S. Kohn, Ed.D</u>
Nominated School #1 (Proper Name)	<u>John Witherspoon Middle School</u>
Address	<u>217 Walnut Lane</u> Street/P. O. Box City <u>Princeton, NJ</u> <u>08540</u> Zip Code
Telephone	<u>609-921-3135</u> Fax <u>924-7347</u> Email <u>.</u>
Principal	<u>William Johnson</u>
Program Developer(s)	<u>Dianne Duncan, Richard Miller</u>
Application Prepared By	<u>Dianne Duncan</u>
Chief School Administrator's or Charter School Lead Person's Signature	<u>Claire S. Kohn</u>

FOR USE BY COUNTY SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS ONLY

Approved: ☒ Yes ☐ No County Superintendent's SignatureThomas J. Rubino

**NEW JERSEY
BEST PRACTICES
2000-2001 APPLICATION**

Application Requirements: Failure to comply with the procedures for submission of the application will result in the elimination of the application.

1. **RESPONSES to the information and the statements below must be ANONYMOUS and ACCURATE.** No reference should be made to the names of the district, the school(s) or community. Use the words "the school" or "the schools" in referring to the applicant in responding to the statements
2. **USE ONLY THE SPACE PROVIDED ON THE APPLICATION FORM on pages 1, 2 (if applicable), and 4.** Do not include any additional materials, as they will not be reviewed in the selection process.
3. Application must be **keyboarded on 8 1/2" x 11" white paper, portrait format. Twelve-point or larger computer font or fourteen-pitch or larger typewritten font must be used.** (This sentence is in twelve-point Times New Roman.)
4. **KEYBOARDED RESPONSES** to all the statements below must be **no more than a total of four pages.** Keyboard and number the statement followed by the response. Format your response for accuracy and clarity.
5. **The information on page 4 and the responses to statements must be copied on one side of the page. The information on pages 1 and 2 (if applicable) must be copied on one side of the page.** Staple pages 1, 2 (if applicable), 4, and the keyboarded responses together, in that same order.
6. **The original application must be signed by the district chief school administrator or charter school lead person, indicating his/her approval.**
7. **The original and seven copies of the application must be submitted to the county superintendent of schools by November 27, 2000, with the Itemized List of District Applications form.** Keep the seven copies of each application together with the original containing the signature of the district chief school administrator or charter school lead person on the top of each set.

The following data is required to assist the panelists in the evaluation of the application:		
Type of School Elementary School _____ <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Middle School _____ Junior High School _____ High School _____ Other: _____	Grade Levels _____ <u>6, 7, 8</u> _____ _____	Practice Name <u>Jefferson Debates</u> <hr/> Number of Schools with Practice <u>1</u> Number of Districts with Practice _____ Location _____ Urban/City <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Suburban With Urban Characteristics _____ Suburban _____ Small City/Town _____ Rural

Check the ONE CATEGORY into which the practice best fits.		
<input type="checkbox"/> Arts (Visual and Performing Arts) <input type="checkbox"/> Assessment/Evaluation <input type="checkbox"/> Bilingual Education and Diversity <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Citizenship/Character Education <input type="checkbox"/> Early Childhood Education Programs <input type="checkbox"/> Educational Support/Guidance and Counseling Programs	<input type="checkbox"/> Educational Technology <input type="checkbox"/> Gifted and Talented Programs <input type="checkbox"/> Health and Physical Education <input type="checkbox"/> Language Arts Literacy <input type="checkbox"/> Mathematics <input type="checkbox"/> Professional Development <input type="checkbox"/> Public Engagement (family involvement and partnerships with business, community, school districts, and/or higher education)	<input type="checkbox"/> Safe Learning Environment <input type="checkbox"/> School-to-Careers/Workplace Readiness <input type="checkbox"/> Science <input type="checkbox"/> Social Studies <input type="checkbox"/> Special Education <input type="checkbox"/> World Languages

1. Describe the practice proposed for recognition, and list its objectives. Detail how the practice is innovative and how it promotes high student achievement.
2. List the specific *Core Curriculum Content Standards, including the Cross-Content Workplace Readiness Standards,** addressed by the practice and describe how the practice addresses those standard(s). Provide an example to substantiate your response.
3. Describe the educational needs of students that the practice addresses. Document the assessment measures used to determine the extent to which the objectives of the practice have been met. Provide assessments and data to show how the practice met these needs.
4. Describe how you would replicate the practice in another school and/or district.

*The 1996 edition of the *Core Curriculum Content Standards* published by the New Jersey State Department of Education was disseminated to all districts and charter schools and is available on line through the department's web site at <http://www.state.nj.us/education>.
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1. Describe the practice proposed for recognition, and list its objectives. Detail how the practice is innovative and how it promotes high student achievement.

The Jefferson Debates truly represent the spirit of our school system. The event, which features our eighth graders, promotes academic excellence, teamwork, community participation, and tradition. Students form debate teams in civics classes, research topics relevant to constitutional issues, and debate these topics in class. Approximately 240 students participate in the debates. Then, the students select the best debaters from among the civics classes to form debate teams across the grade level. The formal debate involves 60 students encompassing all ability levels: students with exceptional abilities, regular education, special education and bilingual/ESL.

The students use materials provided in their civics classes as well as the Internet to research such topics as: direct democracy versus representative democracy, campaign finance reform, the presidential election and Electoral College reform. Students create their own resolutions and formulate their own pro and con arguments. The topics spark intellectual curiosity and enthusiasm as students connect the world of the classroom to current, relevant issues.

The Jefferson Debates are unique because they generate a high level of involvement and academic curiosity among students as well as a great degree of support and involvement among our community and parents. Community involvement is an essential component. Members of the community join the students for two mornings prior to the formal debate to assist in preparation. They work side-by-side with the students researching the information, constructing persuasive arguments, critiquing each other, and finally participating in the actual debates. A formal debate is presented to the eighth grade during the school day followed by a debate in the evening which is open to the public.

The Jefferson Debates promote many essential academic objectives. First and foremost, it promotes citizenship education and the concepts of participating intelligently in our government as well as open-minded inquiry. Students analyze, synthesize, and interpret information; use technology; develop content knowledge; develop social skills and political participation skills; and develop leadership skills. The debates provide an opportunity for directed listening with the purpose of creating rebuttal arguments. Students are provided the opportunity to debate in public and to field questions from the audience.

A high degree of teamwork is fostered by the Jefferson Debates. This teamwork is an essential component to a successful debate. The Debates also promote intergenerational cooperation and collaboration. The high levels of academic achievement and community involvement combine to promote a positive school environment. Students flourish as they think creatively, problem solve, and work cooperatively with peers. The entire eighth grade class eagerly anticipates the Jefferson Debates and their participation as debaters or supportive audience members.

2. List the *Core Curriculum Content Standards, including the Cross-Content Workplace Readiness Standards*, addressed by the practice and describe how the practice addresses those standard(s). Provide an example to substantiate your response.

The Jefferson Debates address the objectives of our school district as well as the Core Curriculum Content Standards. Standard 6.1 states, "All students will learn democratic citizenship and how to participate in the constitutional system of government of the United States." Students

examine the United States Constitution and other historic documents, learn government processes and functions, and study current issues and public policies as they prepare for the Debates. Standard 6.3 states, "All students will acquire historical understanding of political and diplomatic ideas, forces, and institutions throughout the history of New Jersey, the United States, and the world." Public issues related to basic constitutional issues; issues related to the three branches of government; and political leadership, especially in a democracy provide the framework for the Jefferson Debates. Citizenship education is enhanced when we provide illustrated examples of participating intelligently in government. Students gain the ability to analyze and question received interpretations of events and issues. Civics is made relevant by examining current issues and ethical dilemmas.

Standard 6.4: Social History is addressed by the Jefferson Debates. Students learn "how individuals, groups, and institutions influence solutions to society's problems: to argue an ethical position regarding a dilemma from the study of key turning points in history; and to evaluate actions individuals, groups, or institutions might take to counteract incidents of prejudice or discrimination." A study of the 2000 presidential election, the recounting of votes in Florida, and reform of the Electoral College illustrate the connection to this standard.

The Jefferson Debates are particularly well suited to the Civics curriculum. In Civics, students take an in-depth look at our nation's government, its political system, and the foundations of American democracy. The goal of the curriculum is to promote a better understanding of our government and the role we, as informed citizens, play in protecting the fundamental values and principles of democracy. The debates promote these goals by providing an opportunity to research and debate constitutional issues as they relate to our current political system.

The use of technology is addressed by the practice of debate. Students use the Internet to research topics and obtain current, up-to-date information. Research also encompasses sources such as *Time*, *Newsweek*, and television news. Students practice the skill of analyzing the news media.

A unique feature of the Jefferson Debates is that they address a variety of curriculum objectives across disciplines. The debates address several Language Arts Literacy Standards. Standard 3.1 of the *Core Curriculum Content Standards* states that, "All students will speak for a variety of real purposes and audiences." According to the Standard, by the end of the eighth grade, students should: use clear, concise, organized language in speaking situations; speak before a group to defend an opinion and present an oral interpretation; recognize when audiences do not understand the message, and make appropriate adjustments; and receive and use constructive feedback to improve speaking ability. Students demonstrate mastery of these objectives by practicing their arguments, critiquing each other, presenting the debate, making rebuttal arguments and responding to questions from the audience.

Furthermore, the Jefferson Debates address Language Arts Standard 3.2: "All students will listen actively in a variety of situations to information from a variety of sources." Throughout the preparation and presentation of the Debates, the students demonstrate they are able to listen to their peers, their teachers, and members of the community. During their preparation, students listen to each other and make constructive criticisms. During the Debate, the students listen to arguments made by the opposing side and then form rebuttal arguments. Finally, the students must interpret questions from the audience and make appropriate responses.

The *Cross-Content Workplace Readiness Standards* help to "prepare students for a rapidly changing world" and are integrated into the civics curriculum. Standard 2 state, "All students will

use information, technology, and other tools.” and Standard 3 states that “All students will use critical thinking, decision-making, and problem-solving skills.” The Jefferson Debates provide an avenue to incorporate these standards into the process of educating young people to be responsible, participatory citizens. More importantly, however, students are engaged in “experiential education” where students “learn by doing, by helping to select and design projects, by researching possible solutions, by presenting their work to outside review panels, and, finally, by evaluating their work on their own terms.” Learning activities where students are actively engaged increase understanding. Students learn how to work on a team, how to “think on their feet,” how to listen to others, and how to handle constructive criticism. Students gain a great deal of self-satisfaction as they prepare for and participate in the Jefferson Debates.

3. Describe the educational needs of students that the practice addresses. Document the assessment measures used to determine the extent to which the objectives of the practice have been met. Provide assessments and data to show how the practice met these needs.

A variety of assessment measures are used to determine the extent to which the objectives of the Jefferson Debates are met. The core objectives of the Debates are: teamwork, intergenerational cooperation, understanding of constitutional issues, and presentation of an effective debate. The successful presentation of the Jefferson Debates each year illustrates the fact that these objectives are met.

As students prepare for the Debates in the two eighth grade Civics classes, both informal and formal assessments occur. Students are observed to determine the degree of participation, contributions to the group, use of appropriate research materials, and preparation of written arguments. A rubric may be used to evaluate classroom participation as well as performance in the computer lab during research. As the teams prepare the Debates, the students themselves engage in self-evaluation. The classroom debates may be scored using a rubric designed for oral presentations. The classroom debates are judged on the following criteria: organization, coherence, persuasion, argument, and speech (voice and stage presence).

The success of the program is evidenced by the great degree of enthusiasm exhibited by the students, parents, and community who inquire about the upcoming Debates. Many members wish to participate as “coaches” to the debaters. The students themselves are excited by the prospect of being a debater, time keeper, usher, or audience member supporting friends and classmates. The PTO provides a continental breakfast for the debaters and decorates the auditorium with a patriotic theme. The Jefferson Debates are clearly a unique and important tradition with many academic and social benefits for all participants.

The goals of teamwork and intergenerational cooperation are both observable behaviors. The two eighth grade civics teachers guide each of the teams, observing and evaluating the progress. A high degree of teamwork is evident in the preparation for the Debates. The students work effectively with students with whom they might not normally get to work. The success of the teamwork is most observable in the actual Debate. The teams demonstrate that the work was fairly divided, the arguments were coherently organized, and the teams were well rehearsed.

Intergenerational cooperation is also readily observable by the teachers, the participants, and the audience. Throughout the preparation for the Debates, the students consistently look to the senior members of the teams for guidance, leadership, and approval. The community members regularly express their pleasure at being included in the Jefferson Debates and having the opportunity to work with a younger generation. It provides both generations with a greater

appreciation of each other. The senior members also provide their evaluation of the progress of the teams which help to confirm the teachers' evaluations that all members of the teams worked well together.

In addition to observable behaviors, the Jefferson Debates are also assessed by more formal means. The students' arguments are critiqued by peers, teachers, and community participants. Revisions are then incorporated into the final arguments. The ability of the students to analyze information, organize it and present it in a clear and persuasive manner is demonstrated by the quality of their final arguments.

As part of the Debates, the teams are officially judge on the following criteria: organization (Has the team planned well?); coherence (Is the presentation logical? Does it all fit together?); persuasion (Were you convinced?); argument (Has the team proved its side?); speech (Was there good voice and stage presence?). These criteria are used to determine a winner for each of the topics debated. In this way, the students' ability to gather information, organize it in an effective manner, and verbally present it in a logical order with which to persuade an audience can be assessed.

The students' knowledge of the key principles of the Constitution and their ability to apply the information to public issues can also be assessed. The students demonstrate their mastery of the issues by presenting persuasive arguments during the Debate. At the same time, they also demonstrate their critical listening skills. Students must have a mastery of the topic as well as the ability to listen actively in order to make rebuttal arguments. The students' achievement of these objectives is demonstrated by their ability to respond to questions from the audience. In responding to the questions, students must understand the issues, think quickly, and apply what they have learned in new ways. In addition, students are assessed as to the "measurement of growth in higher order thinking, the quality of their social participation, and in the appreciation of democratic ideals and American heritage."

4. Describe how you would replicate the practice in another school and/or district.

A school and/or district must have teachers with a strong civics background and expertise in the Constitution who are willing to sponsor such a project. Strong advocates for interdisciplinary instruction are necessary for such a practice to be effective. Teachers must be willing to work together, share ideas, plan, organize, and equally prepare and organize students. An enthusiasm for interactive learning which extends far beyond paper-pencil learning and the belief that students learn most when actively engaged are the key ingredients to the success of such a program.

A curriculum which is relevant to the students is vitally important. A commitment by the principal and his/her support for innovative ideas which allow the teacher to take risks are key ingredients. The support of supervisors and fellow teachers enable sponsors to work to create a program which impacts the entire school climate and represents a highlight in eighth grade students' academic year. Support from the community in the form of community coaches, intergenerational cooperation, and parental support and enthusiasm facilitate the success of a practice such as the Jefferson Debates.

The Jefferson Debates foster an appreciation of democratic ideals and an awareness of the importance of participating in our democratic society. The success of a program such as the Jefferson Debates really rests with the students and their belief that they do indeed "shape the future."